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# DRAMA

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# DRAMA

APRIL MCMXXVI

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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## THE BEST PLAYS OF MARCH

By Charles Morgan

**W**HAT an embarrassing title it is! "The Best Plays"—I groan beneath its unpromising frown. I begin to understand what those unhappy men must feel who are called upon to award prizes to students of some dramatic academy. They have not, like critics, to convey to others their own impression of a dozen works of art; they have to say without qualification which is the "best"—no matter how widely the works they have to consider may vary in purpose and manner. It is, of course, an impossible task. There can be no "best" about it. Criticism of an art does not permit of these absolute statements. Besides, in an article of this kind, how horrible it would be if one were to forget some obvious masterpiece! If you detect such an omission, perhaps you will be gentle enough to assume that through some misfortune I did not see the play of your choice.

I pretend, then, neither to final judgment nor to comprehensive record. I can say only—and that briefly—which of the plays that have come my way have given me most pleasure. Of these I would speak first of Andreyev's "Katerina" at the Barnes Theatre. Here is an attempt to write directly of the human soul and I happen to prefer even failure (so long as it be an artist's failure) in such an attempt to all the sparkling trivialities in the world. The pace is forced in the second half of the play with the result that crudities appear from which the first two acts are free, but the earlier passages are as exquisite in form as they are profound in thought and the whole play is wrapped round with creative fire.

For cold argumentative contrast go to "Mrs. Warren's Profession." Miss Edyth Goodall makes it exciting because she forces Mrs. Warren through blatancy into life. The play's argument is clear and vigorous, and (if you are prepared to regard all life from the economic point of view) it holds good. If, on the other hand, you feel, as Mr. Shaw himself appears to have felt by the time he came to write "Methuselah," that economics are not all the world, you will perceive that, in its materialistic emphasis, "Mrs. Warren's Profession" is indeed old-fashioned though, as Mr. Shaw claims, her problem remains to-day.

There remain Benavente's "The Passion Flower" at the Everyman, "The Shoemaker's Holiday" at the Old Vic. and "The Way to Keep Him," very amusingly performed, at the East London College. Frankly, I shirk speaking of Benavente except at great length, but the performance, though it gave me a curious impression of seeing the play through a distorting glass, was good enough to excite speculation as to the precise nature of the distortion.

"The Shoemaker's Holiday" of Dekker is full of good fun and, what is rarer, of good humour. Moreover it suits the Old Vic. company which is at its worst in a stylistic comedy of manners and at its best when it is most free to rollick without sophistication. And I cannot miss this opportunity to draw attention to the plays that are performed now and then at East London College. Arthur Murphy's "The Way to Keep Him," a brilliant piece of work, was a good example of the wisdom of Professor Allardyce Nicoll's choice.

# THE ARTIST IN THE THEATRE

An Interview with Mr. Paul Shelving

A NOTABLE factor in Mr. Shelving's career as a designer of scenery and costumes is that he is not a painter who has turned to the theatre for a medium, but a man of the theatre first and foremost. "I liked the theatre long before I liked painting," he says. "Once upon a time I thought I was born to be a writer of poetic plays. I had written several by the time I was fourteen. However, those plays were soon put on the fire, and in the end I decided that it was as a designer that I could probably work most usefully in the theatre. So I trained as an artist for this purpose." Often one hears him spoken of as a "pupil" or a "disciple" of Lovat Fraser, but at least four years before Lovat Fraser began to work in the theatre Mr. Shelving had designed scenery for children's plays at the Court Theatre very much in his present style of brilliant colouring laid on in flat washes.

In all his settings Mr. Shelving seeks to emphasize the prevailing mood of the play in the scenery. His settings are never merely unimaginative backgrounds to the plays. Whenever possible he likes to use scenery in a frankly decorative manner. When the play does not allow this, he aims at "suggesting" the scene by jogging the imagination of the audience. Realistic scenery, except for everyday interiors, he detests. His farmhouse kitchen in "The Farmer's Wife" is as near as he has ever come to realism, and yet it is not quite like any farm kitchen of reality—though it helps out the spirit of the play and at the same time gives an atmosphere of reality far more vividly than any carefully and exactly realistic set could have done.

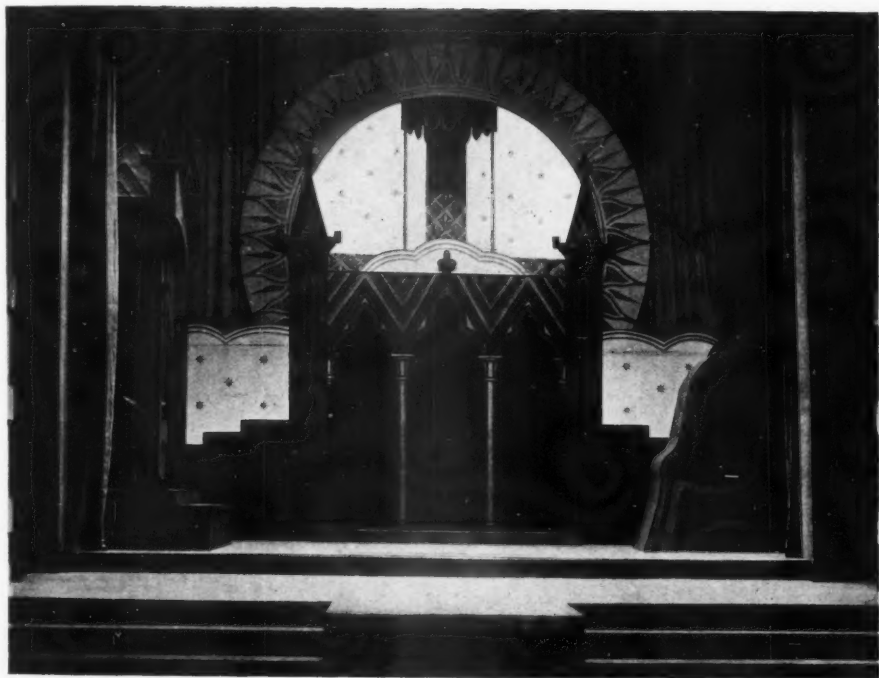
"After all," he points out, "in attempting to produce realistic exterior scenes on the stage one is merely attempting the impossible. Interiors are the work of man, so they can be imitated. But to attempt to reproduce nature on the stage is absurd. In a picture it is different. There unity is achieved because both the landscape and the figures are of paint. But in the theatre only hopeless incongruity can be the result

of attempting to combine real people with a painted background pretending to be as real as the figures moving before it."

The bold colour-schemes, for which Mr. Shelving is so well known, often have a certain symbolic value. For instance, in the present production of "Saint Bernard," Heaven is a brilliant blue, and earth "a rather dull, stodgy sort of red." The saints are made to appear as brilliant and glittering as possible, with gilded hair and beards of silk, to emphasize the difference between them and the inhabitants of the earth. The family of Saint Bernard, "rather a brawny sort of family," are dressed in warm colours, while the Miolans family, who tend to be exquisites, wear greens and blues. But this method has practical as well as symbolic uses. It lends itself to easy and effective grouping, it avoids the fussy and distracting effect so often caused by elaborately-costumed crowds in a play, and in Elizabethan plays it is sometimes a great help for the audience readily to be able to distinguish rival parties. Thus, in "Romeo and Juliet" the family of Capulet and their retainers were dressed in orange and red, the Montagues in blue and black.

Talking of the practical side of his work, Mr. Shelving insisted on the necessity for building up the scene to scale on a model. Besides the usefulness to the artist himself, it is of immense value when the actual scenery is being made. Not only does it give the workmen a very clear idea of what they have to do, but it arouses their interest so that they work much more intelligently. "It is useless, too," continued Mr. Shelving, "simply to make a coloured sketch of a costume and leave it to be carried out. 'Oh, yes, something like that. We quite understand.' And the result is, at the best—well, 'something like it.'"

It must be a charming life to be a designer of costumes, we think, as we glance at the sketches hung up in the foyer. To dash off these gay designs and leave the rest to the dressmakers—it must be delightful. But in reality, every detail of a costume has to be worked out by its designer. For instance, every jewel has to be painted



SCENE FOR "THE MARVELLOUS HISTORY OF ST. BERNARD," AT THE KINGSWAY THEATRE. DESIGNED BY PAUL SHELVEING.

The stage and auditorium represent the Earth. In the centre at the back is the porch of the Monastery of Aosta. Above it is the balcony of Heaven, from which the Saints counsel and admonish the dwellers upon earth. On the right is the Mont Joux, with the statue of Jupiter on its summit; in which statue Satan has taken up his abode. While on the left is seen the Castle of Menthon, revealing Bernard's room and the window from which he made his miraculous escape.



## THE ARTIST IN THE THEATRE

exactly in its actual size, every wig has to be drawn on a large scale and in elaborate detail—and so on through every particular of each costume. But it is the patterns and designs on the stuffs used for the costumes which mean the most work for the designer. Real brocades, for instance, are useless on the stage. Their designs become niggling and ineffective. On the stage every effect has to be a little broader than in actual life, so materials have to be specially printed for the costumes—which means that first every design has to be painted the actual size for the woodblocks to be made from them.

Referring to the design of the present-day theatre and its drawbacks for the artist. Mr. Shelving said, "The picture-

frame stage of to-day would seem to answer well enough the requirements of most of the modern dramatists, and the plays of more recent times. For Shakespeare and the earlier plays I consider it inadequate. For instance, this play of 'St. Bernard,' which is essentially a pageant play, requires a theatre built in such a way that from every seat in the house it is possible to have a view of a central passage or two side aisles leading from the auditorium to the stage, along which the various processions can pass. But really, I do not think I have any very definite ideas on the subject. I am so busy working in the theatre as it is, that I never seem to have much time to think about the theatre as it ought to be."

## AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL LOVERS OF SHAKESPEARE

**O**N March 6, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, at Stratford-upon-Avon was burnt down.

In that theatre for nearly fifty years the memory of Shakespeare had been honoured in the best and truest way possible, namely by presenting his plays publicly upon the stage. Here it was possible for a visitor to see eight different plays in the course of one week. Not only was Shakespeare's memory thus honoured: opportunity was given to the people of benefiting by great drama, which is now recognized as one of the most important influences on the national life.

The achievement of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in this beneficial task was lately acknowledged by His Majesty The King in the grant to it of a Royal Charter. The work accomplished and the experience gained provide a firm foundation upon which to build for the future; but a stage and auditorium which were adequate fifty years ago would be inadequate for the greater number of spectators who now come from all parts of the Empire and of the world to attend the two annual Shakespeare Festivals.

In consequence of the burning of the old theatre the nation will quite evidently call for the building and endowment of a

new theatre worthy of Shakespeare's native town, and sufficient for present and future needs.

The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre was known to millions in the Dominions and in the United States of America, who doubtless will be eager to help in rebuilding it on a worthy scale. We feel confident that the inhabitants of the British Isles will need no urging appeal to contribute to this national undertaking with a readiness which will allow the work to be taken in hand without further delay.

(Signed) STANLEY BALDWIN.

J. RAMSAY MACDONALD.  
OXFORD AND ASQUITH.  
THOMAS HARDY.

This appeal requires no commendation from the Drama League. We need only say that we trust that every reader will regard it as his or her duty to subscribe at least something to the rebuilding of the Memorial Theatre. For this purpose we have opened a Fund, and the Hon. Treasurer will be glad to receive sums, large or small, which will be duly acknowledged in our columns. A subscription of £5 5s. will entitle the donor to become an Associate Member of the new theatre, with special privileges.



# THE DRAMA REPORT OF THE ADULT EDUCATION COMMITTEE

IT was a happy idea that inspired the Adult Education Committee of the Board of Education to follow up their report on British Music with one on British Drama (published by H.M. Stationery Office, price 1s. net.) The result is a survey of what is certainly the most remarkable artistic development that has occurred in this country since the war. Such a claim is sometimes met with polite or impolite scepticism. But now no one need be afraid to revive the boast, for here is chapter and verse for it, offered with the cool responsibility of an "official document" which provides, incidentally, a not unimportant chapter in the history of post-war reconstruction.

The facts contained in the Report will be familiar, many of them, to members of the Drama League. They are set forth in a series of sections, the headings of which form the best indication of the method and scope of the Committee's enquiry.

They include such subjects as:—"The Relation of the Drama and Adult Education," "The Nature and History of the Dramatic Art," "The Professional Theatre," "The British Drama League," "Amateur Societies in the Towns," "The Drama in Educational Institutions," "Drama and the Churches," "The Drama in the Countryside," "Difficulties of Amateur Societies," "Teachers and Producers," "Shakespeare Associations," "A National Theatre."

Written or oral evidence was taken from no fewer than eighty witnesses, among whom are to be found most of those who have been prominent, whether as active workers, critics or patrons in the development of community and educational drama.

As a handbook of information, the Report could scarcely be bettered, though it suggests the need for what will one day no doubt be forthcoming, a more detailed history of the movement, dealing not only with its achievements but with the personalities which have made those achievements possible.

The conclusions and recommendations

which the Committee have arrived at, will be scrutinized with even greater interest than the facts they have brought together. Here again we can give praise for the enlightened sympathy with which the Committee have approached the many problems raised. If the official mind ever succumbs to pedantry, there is no trace of it here. Nothing, for instance, could be fresher than this recommendation given under the heading of "Teachers and Producers."

"While we attach the greatest importance to skilled direction, we consider that if a society numbers among its members someone who has a marked talent for 'production,' it is well advised to sacrifice the greater finish, which may be conferred by a professional producer, to the more intimate atmosphere which commonly exists when a society has relied throughout on the talents of its members alone."

It is unfortunate that the Committee had rested from its labours before the question of the economic relation between the amateur and the professional stage was raised by the Stage Guild, though as a matter of fact the majority of the societies dealt with in the Report are not among those likely to be found renting a local theatre for their performances. The professional theatre is, however, dealt with in a section of the Report, and an attempt made to define the special provinces of amateur and professional. The attitude of the Committee on this subject is summarized as follows:—

"We recognize that the greatest acting is the prerogative of the professional artist, the greatest production of a play the prerogative of the professional stage, and that drama reaches its highest realization as a form of art in the professional theatre. But apart from this consideration, we consider that all the educational benefits which are inherent in seeing the drama are equally inherent in participation in the drama, and participation confers many benefits which are not conferred by the witnessing of a play. We conceive, therefore, that drama reaches its highest realization as an instru-

## DRAMA REPORT OF THE ADULT EDUCATION COMMITTEE

ment of education in the hands of the amateur."

This, it might be argued, is all very well. But can an amateur participation in stage work, however effective in its own way, be compared in any real sense with the quiet contemplation of a masterpiece of theatre art? If in this particular the Report is open to controversy, it is only fair to add that elsewhere the fullest credit is given to such professional productions as those of Miss Lena Ashwell, the Old Vic, and the Arts League of Service, where avowedly educational ends are known to be served by professional means. The con-

nexion between education and the very highest artistic standard is also recognized in the welcome allusions to the National Theatre as the keystone, as it were, of the arch of educational drama.

For the rest, we must refer our readers to the Report itself. To the unconverted it should prove something of a revelation, and to the converted a new sanction for their faith. Nor must we conclude this brief notice without a word of congratulation to Mr. Douie, the Secretary to the Committee, for the ability and thoroughness which he has brought to what must have been an arduous task.

## THE SPANISH STAGE OF TO-DAY

By Charles Petrie

UNTIL very recent years the modern Spanish Theatre has been most undeservedly neglected, and even now it suggests little to the mind of the average student of the drama save the names of Jacinto Benavente and Martinez Sierra. Yet in reality it has by no means lagged behind in the renaissance which is at present taking place in all departments of Spanish life, and there, as elsewhere, the determination to evolve along national lines rather than to copy foreign ideas is evident. A sane, but nevertheless fervid, nationalism is everywhere the order of the day in Spain, and this spirit is being increasingly reflected in the theatre.

To attempt to understand the Spanish stage in the light of the French is to doom oneself to failure at the start. It is true that during certain periods—notably in the eighteenth century and during the heyday of the Romantic movement—Spanish dramatists almost slavishly imitated their Northern neighbours, but in the great days of Lope de Vega the reverse was the case, and at the present moment the tide is flowing strongly in the same direction. As Paris becomes increasingly more cosmopolitan her theatres have to bow to the inevitable, but few foreigners go to the play in Madrid and no appreciable number in Barcelona so that their influence is not felt. Nor is the dramatic talent of the country centred in the capital as in France, for Barcelona is a

vigorous centre of artistic life and in no way considers itself inferior in Madrid. Thus the modern Spanish Theatre, far from being influenced by the French, has definitely broken away from that of Paris, and the distance between them is rapidly widening.

The originator of this new national movement was, of course, Benavente, who in the closing years of last century, wrested the leadership of the Spanish stage from Echeveray and thereby turned the drama into a new channel. For Romanticism there appeared what Mr. Walter Starkie calls Feminism, and in this Benavente has been followed by Martinez Sierra and the brothers Quintero. Foreign plays and their adaptations have gone out of favour, and when "A Woman of No Importance" was produced in Madrid in the Autumn of 1924, it proved a complete failure in spite of extensive advertisement. One reason for the non-success of imported plays is the fact that family life in Spain—where divorce does not exist—still retains its hold over the vast majority of the people, and the average playgoer resents the tone of the modern English or French play. At the same time the rise of a national school of dramatists is an equally important factor in the reaction against foreign drama.

Both Benavente and Martinez Sierra are too well known to need more than a passing mention to English readers, and those who



DESIGN FOR COSTUME FOR "RIVERSIDE NIGHTS," BY  
JOHN ARMSTRONG. AT THE LYRIC THEATRE, HAMMERSMITH

## THE SPANISH STAGE OF TO-DAY

have witnessed the crowds that flocked recently to the Lara Theatre to see Lola Membrives play Julia in "La Otra Honra," or the thronged houses at the Eslava will be in no doubt as to the popularity which both the great dramatists still enjoy. Don Pedro Muñoz Seca is, on the other hand, unknown in England, where none of his plays have yet been given, though he has for a long time enjoyed great popularity both in Spain and in South America. He is the leading exponent of the "comedia" which depends for its interest upon local colour—a "comedia" in Spanish meaning merely a play with a happy ending, though its subject may be serious; for that reason it may be some time before any of Muñoz Seca's plays are seen in London, but it explains his enormous popularity in his own country where provincial feeling is so pronounced. Another dramatist who is so far unknown outside the Peninsula is Guillermo Fernández-Shaw, but it is rumoured that his "Doña Francisquita"—founded on Lope de Vega's "La Discreta Enamorada"—is to be given in London at an early date. It was first produced in San Sebastian in the spring of 1924, and has since then been a great success whenever it has been played.

When one comes to examine the state of the Spanish Theatre a little more closely one is met by a series of paradoxes which are distinctly disconcerting. While new theatres are continually being opened—especially in Madrid—the managers are loud in their complaints of the shortage of dramatists, and to a certain extent their lamentations are supported by the Press; at the same time the playwrights are equally vociferous in their denunciations of the managers, whom they accuse of viewing the plays put before them solely from the standpoint of the parts which they may contain for some actor or actress whose name is a box-office draw, while both parties declare that outside Madrid and Barcelona the cinema is ruining the stage. To a certain extent these accusations are not by any means purely Spanish for they are equally to be met in London, but they do repay investigation in so far as a consideration of them leads to a more complete understanding of the modern Spanish Theatre.

A big name on the bills is of even more

importance in Madrid than it is in London, for although the cost of production is infinitely lower the run of even a highly successful piece is much shorter than in England, while actresses such as Maria Guerrero have established a hold over the public unknown in London in recent years.

In these circumstances it is hardly fair to blame the managers for paying close attention to their casts, and the dramatists can at any rate console themselves that they have the advantage over their English contemporaries in being every day less threatened by foreign competition.

The cinema is undoubtedly a serious rival. In many of the smaller towns—and even in some large ones—theatrical performances now only take place at intervals, and the cinema has filled the gap to the detriment of its rival. The average Spanish touring company is distinctly bad, and if the future of the theatre in the provinces is to be left in its hands, then the outlook is indeed gloomy. The remedy is, however, in the hands of those who complain if they will but use it; for provincial feeling is quite powerful enough to support local companies of players, and in that way not only would the competition of the cinema be fairly met, but the basis of the Spanish Theatre as a whole would be greatly broadened. Time alone will show whether such a step will be taken, but if it is then a prosperous future can safely be promised for the Spanish drama of to-day.

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Mr. Clarence Stratton, Director of English of the Board of Education, Educational Department, Cleveland, U.S.A., informs us that he will be in England from July 30 till August 26 next, and would be prepared to lecture on the American Little Theatre movement. Mr. Stratton is the author of that well-known book, "Producing in Little Theatres," and he has had a considerable practical experience in play-production, notably with the Artists' Guild of St. Louis. "As I travel a great deal in the United States," writes Mr. Stratton, "I have seen most of the local buildings and organizations, extending from open-air performances on the coast of Maine to the beautiful Lobero Theatre at Santa Barbara, California."

Mr. Stratton is already engaged to speak at Bingley, Yorkshire, on July 31, and any member of the League who would like to be put into communication with him should apply to the Secretary of the Drama League as soon as possible.

# THE THEATRE OF THE PAST

A Causerie Conducted by Allardyce Nicoll

A GOOD deal that is of real interest to the student of the stage is still to be gleaned from the period of the Restoration. Samuel Pepys, incorrigible gossip as he was, has noted on March 4, 1668/9, a quarrel between Sir W. Coventry and the Duke of Buckingham, observing that it was "about a design between the Duke and Sir Robert Howard, to bring him into a play at the King's house."<sup>\*</sup> Nothing so far has been known of this projected satire, but Mr. E. S. de Bear, a student of Restoration social conditions, has kindly sent me some information which he has come across in the course of his researches. This play, and the incident, are referred to in a document preserved at the British Museum (Add. MS. 36,916), and from this source as well as others, it would appear that the play was named "The Country Gentleman," that it was actually ready for production at the Theatre Royal in March, 1668/9, and that the real cause of the quarrel was that Buckingham had inserted into what was (apparently) an innocuous comedy a character-portrait of satirical tendency directed at Coventry.

The whole story is an interesting one, because it serves to throw still further light upon the essentially social and intimate nature of the Restoration theatre and drama. There has hardly been a period in our history when so much of personal satire was inserted in plays and relished by all the spectators save those who were old-fashioned enough — like Sir William Coventry — to take offence at the witticisms of which they were the object. A hitherto undescribed and untitled drama of c. 1680-82 is also preserved in the Sloane MS. 1828. Among a series of satirical characters — Lovewell, Trueboy, Lady Tumble — there appears a Presbyterian minister, named Doolittle, seemingly a portrait of an actual Presbyterian divine of the same name. These Restoration wits could go so far as to pillory their opponents or

their social enemies in person and name upon the stage.

Among a number of exceedingly interesting "snippets" of information, Mr. de Bear has sent me a copy of a very valuable poem on Buckingham, quoted from Add. MS. 23,722. This I do not remember having seen elsewhere. It contains a mass of contemporary allusions, among which one directly concerns the theatre. The anonymous author takes the opportunity of referring to "The Rehearsal," that famous satirical attack upon John Dryden and Sir William D'Avenant. Says this authority:—

I confess the dances were very well writ,  
And the tunes and the times by Hains as well hit,  
And Littlewood's motion and dance had much wit.

This criticism is of interest, for, even though it is penned by an avowed enemy of Buckingham, it shows how much of the pure wit, for which we to-day esteem "The Rehearsal," was lost upon contemporaries. The actors with their dances (making all allowance for the ridicule of the verses) must indeed have captured as many hearts as the satirists with their biting lines.

Much more documentary evidence of a like kind must lie concealed in the British Museum and elsewhere. It is only when we take into full account all the various scattered, and often at first sight worthless, references and records, that we can come to a true estimation of the peculiar position held by the Restoration period in dramatic literature.

## LIBRARY NOTE.

We have to thank Miss D. Callwell for a number of books on the History of the Stage, including "Shakespeare's True Life," by James Walter, and several plays in the Mermaid series. Mr. Howard Peacey has presented some fifty volumes of French dramatic criticism which will materially enhance the value of the French section of the Library. It may interest members to know that a record number of books were issued during March. The total amounted to 1,523, more than double the number of issues during March, 1925.

<sup>\*</sup> Wheatley edn. iii. 230.

## BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



### THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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*Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.*

ON Thursday, March 15, Colonel Headlam asked the following question in the House of Commons:—"Whether, in view of the fact that the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee is contemplating the acceptance of a site in London for the building of a National Theatre, and in view of the Committee's avowed intention to appeal for Government support when the site has been acquired, the Government will, before any irrevocable action has been taken by the Memorial Committee, take steps to inquire into the suitability of the proposed site for the purpose of a National Theatre." The Chancellor of the Exchequer gave the following reply:—"This is a hypothetical question. I do not think that in present financial circumstances the Government could take any step which would give the Committee reason to expect that a Government contribution would be forthcoming."

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Such an answer was in the circumstances perhaps only to be expected, but Colonel Headlam's question remains a very pertinent one. At no time more than the present is it more desirable that movements towards a National Theatre should be carefully watched. Five years ago there was something to be said for hasty action; for then there was apparent a wide-spread enthusiasm for social and artistic betterment—an enthusiasm which might have been invoked in the cause of almost any scheme which held out promise of a theatrical millennium. But now public support can only be expected for a really sound scheme, and Colonel Headlam's appeal for more light on the subject should, we feel, not go unanswered by those responsible for the future of the National Theatre.

Carrying on the principle embodied in the support given to the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells, the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust have now given their attention to the work of Repertory Companies in other parts of the country. They are aware that during the initial years these companies often find themselves in financial difficulties. The Trust has therefore decided, with the aid of an Advisory Committee set up at their request by the British Drama League, to consider a limited number of applications for short term grants. The conditions will be a high standard of performance, definite evidence that the company or theatre has a recognized standing in its own district, and a reasonable hope of being independent at the end of the grant period.

Arrangements for the Annual Competition among London Dramatic Societies are well in hand. This year the competitors are divided into two sections—advanced and elementary—competitors being able to enter under which section they please. Forty-six have entered (19 under the advanced section and 27 under the elementary section) as against an entry of 44 clubs last year. The preliminary trials will take place in May and the final competition will be held early in June.



# MONTHLY BOOK LIST

*Land of Many Names.* By Josef Capek. Allen and Unwin. 3s. 6d.

*The Song of Drums.* By Ashley Dukes. Benn. 3s. 6d.

*Granite.* By Clemence Dane. Heinemann. 6s.  
*The Rising Sun.* By Herman Heijermans. Labour Publishing Co. 3s. 6d.

*Five Country Plays.* By L. du Garde Peach. French. 2s. 6d.

*Four Plays for Children.* By Beatrice Mayor. Blackwell. 2s. 6d.

*Don't Tell Timothy.* By Mark Arundel. Putnam. 3s. 6d.

*The Calling of Bride.* By Isobel Hutchison. Eneas Mackay. 3s. 6d.

*David.* By D. H. Lawrence. Secker. 15s.

*The Plough and the Stars.* By Sean O'Casey. Macmillan. 5s.

It seems as if expressionism has come to the end of the blind alley down which it has been moving. "The Land of Many Names" merely repeats the formula once more. The satire behind it is as thin and platitudinous as that of the majority of expressionist plays, and it fails to express itself emotionally because the characters are mere symbols. It is impossible to have any feeling for symbols. It is "an interesting play," but it is not enough to be just "interesting" in the theatre. Yet the play is worth reading for the way in which the author clutches at his only chance of stirring his audience, and fills his play with the excitement of sheer movement—night, darkness, uproar and turmoil, constant change of scene, and many effectively theatrical moments like the shadow-picture of soldiers marching to the sound of drums in a blood-red glow.

"The Song of Drums," which tells the story of Tyl Eulenspiegel, in another play which owes much of its effect to bustling action. In addition, there is plenty of racy language, a full-throated rabble who are always ready for a scrap, any amount of ripe, straightforward comedy, and scene after scene so effective to the eye that its production would be a thankful task. In other words, it is a rattling good costume play. But we confess that we had hoped for more than that.

There is a gaunt magnificence about Miss Dane's play. It is as if its atmosphere took its key from the harshness and cruelty of the granite rocks of Lundy a century ago. The story itself is not quite equal to the atmosphere. It is a story brilliantly told from the theatrical point of view, but at the end we feel that it sought to be terrible but has only achieved the grim and the horrible.

Miss Christopher St. John, in her preface to "The Rising Sun," is very, very anxious that we should like the play, but obviously she is afraid that we will have no patience for Heijermans' "jig-saw methods." Perhaps she wrote her preface before people got into the habit of riding for miles in a bus to see Tchekov's plays; for Heijermans' technique has much in common with Tchekov's. So here is the opportunity for an enterprising company to profit by the present popularity of Tchekov and produce this quietly beautiful play, which has only been performed in England for a single night, seven years ago.

We are almost grateful to Dr. Peach for including in his book two plays which do not "come off." They serve to remind us how easy and usual it is in dialect plays to allow the characters to lapse into a kind of doddering sentimentality and a "simplicity" which is merely exasperating. We turn all the more gratefully to the rich and mellow sentimentalism of "The Man in the Moon"; the sturdy, earth-smelling humour of "The Marrying of William" and the bare hardness of "The World Beyond," with its climax of stark, primæval terror.

Mrs. Beatrice Mayor knows that children love pretending to be grown up. We suspect that she also shares our dislike of having to watch dumpy children wobble uncertainly upon one leg in blasphemous imitation of fairies—which has always happened with painstaking frequency in all the plays we have seen performed by children. Anyway, Mrs. Mayor has frankly used children in these plays almost as marionettes, giving us "An old gentleman" aged six, and "A young lady" aged five with a fiancé aged four. The acting of these plays should give infinitely more delight both to the child and the looker-on than any play of the kind usually performed by children.

"Don't Tell Timothy" has a preposterously impossible plot, occasional lapses into the type of humour which consists in a false moustache coming off and sticking to a girl's face during a kiss, and a character of so convenient a degree of deafness that when somebody mentions a mausoleum he amiably discusses the Coliseum. Yet it is by no means the laboriously coy and skittish sort of play which its title leads one to expect. In fact, it is an unusually amusing farce and an ideal play for country-house theatricals. It is good fun even to read—and a farce has to be rather more than tolerably good to make anything of a show in print.

"The Calling of Bride" is a brief mystery play founded upon the Gaelic legend of St. Bride. It is packed with opportunities for beautiful and dramatic spectacle, and written with a sense of the theatre painfully rare among writers who usually attempt this kind of drama.

Mr. Lawrence's play has dignity, often nobility, always a grave, unbending beauty; yet it remains a play which one admires more than one enjoys.

As tragedy "The Plough and the Stars" is heavy-fingered work. The agony is industriously piled on until the result would be sheer bathos were it not for the brilliance and sincerity of the character-drawing. "Juno and the Paycock" is tragic and pitiful throughout—although its audiences seem to regard it as uproarious comedy with a few minutes' tragedy tacked on at the end—but it is never merely ugly. "The Plough and the Stars," on the other hand, is a morbid and clumsy insistence on sheer physical violence and horror; and there are touches like the needless introduction of a consumptive child which only serve to irritate one by laying bare the crudity with which the author seeks to cudgel one's sensibilities into responsiveness. But there is no denying the richness and vividness, so often touched by beauty, with which every character is drawn—except the Cockney soldiers in the last act, who speak a remarkable language of Mr. O'Casey's own invention.

N. M.



# THE TOURNAMENT AWARD

By W. A. Darlington

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FOR the last three years, Mr. David Belasco, the manager and playwright, has presented a cup to be competed for by the American Little Theatres (that is, amateur dramatic societies) in a New York playhouse. The fourth tournament in this series is to take place in May, and its promoters some time ago invited the British Drama League to send out an amateur company to be one of the twenty competitors for this cup. The Secretary of the Drama League (Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth) circularized the members of the League, and received the names of seven societies which were willing to make the journey, if selected. He then invited the *Daily Telegraph* to make itself responsible for the selection of the League's representative; with the result that I found myself invested with plenary but rather embarrassing powers, and commanded to visit those seven societies and sit in judgment upon them. That is to say, I was given the opportunity to get myself disliked more widely than even a dramatic critic can generally manage. Having consumed the bread and salt of some of the most ambitious amateurs in this country, I must show my gratitude by ruthlessly dashing the hopes of the greater proportion of them; the one consolation being that I should be able to get clear away with the bread and salt while my hosts were still hopeful. Accordingly, I set out upon my task weighed down with a sense of responsibility, tempered by the reflection that, as nobody else was to visit the seven places but myself, there could at least be no appeal against my judgment.

## THE SOUTH-WEST

My first victims were the Folk House Players at Bristol, whose play was "A Fool and His Money," by Laurence Housman. This piece was acted soundly enough, but it called for rather more subtlety of technique than the company had at command; and I felt that the expense incurred

by sending so very short a play all the way to New York would hardly be justified by results. The Gloucester Vale Group, at Cheltenham, did *Oliphant Downs*' "A Maker of Dreams" cleverly; and, in view of sundry casualties and production troubles their promise was better than their performance. If nothing better turned up I felt that these players would uphold the prestige of the Drama League—though I must confess that I am sick to death of pretty plays about Pierrot and Pierrette and their circle. However, the real issue turned out to lie among the subsequent competitors. Mrs. Spencer-Watson, in her little Studio Theatre at Swanage, had something quite remarkably finished to show. She staged two productions. One, a "Hymn to Dionysus," in song and mime, though beautifully done, struck me as missing the Bacchic spirit; I had an irreverent feeling that it might have been rechristened "Memorial Service to Homer," without upsetting anybody's susceptibilities in the audience. But the other, a version of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Pegasus story ("The Winged Horse," in *Tanglewood Tales*), was quite another matter. The story was partly read and partly mimed; and I have nothing but praise for the completeness with which every detail of the music, the miming, and the setting had been thought out and carried through. I have often seen this kind of thing done before by amateurs, and have been known to mock at the results; but here everything was done with a technical skill and a command of medium that was quite admirable. I should like America to see this piece of work; but I have a sneaking feeling that it might be considered *hors concours* in a competition for one-act plays, and I doubt very much if it would transplant happily to a large theatre. The Bournemouth Dramatic Club next added to my perplexities by putting on an excellent production of Barrie's little-known "Barbara's Wedding," which contained, in Mr. Stone's old Colonel, perhaps



SCENE FROM "THE HAIRY APE," BY EUGENE O'NEILL, AS PRODUCED THIS SPRING AT TAIROFF'S KAMERNY THEATRE, MOSCOW. REPRODUCED BY COURTESY OF MR. BASIL DEAN.

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the best individual piece of acting in the whole series, and was all very slick and professional—much what you might expect to see on the stage of the Coliseum.

### WELWYN AND THE NORTH

However, Bournemouth's nose was almost immediately put out of joint by Welwyn Garden City. This society had had the enterprise to find themselves a really good unpublished play—"The Banns of Marriage," by Charles Lee, an amusing trifle of Cornish life, really brilliantly cast in all four characters, soundly acted, and even more reminiscent of the Coliseum than its predecessor. Next came the Huddersfield Thespians, who put on two plays. The first was an original play, "Liddy," by J. R. Gregson (whose "T' Marsdens" and "Young Imeson" have both been seen, and deservedly praised, at the Everyman Theatre). Mr. Gregson produced and acted in his play himself, and despite a last-minute casualty the acting was good and the Yorkshire atmosphere perfect. I was disappointed a little in the play, however, because it allowed me to anticipate half-way through what was going to happen; and an anticlimax, dangerous in a long play, is fatal in a short one. The second was F. Sladen Smith's "St. Simeon Stylites." Here you have St. Simeon actually in situ on his column among the treetops, visited in turn by the world (a king), the flesh (a beautiful woman), and the devil (himself, as they say when film-stars appear in the flesh). Each tries to tempt the Saint to come down, and marvels at the faith which enables him to resist; but Simeon confesses finally that he is restrained not by faith, but only by habit. This is an original piece of work, and the theme is treated with humour and a certain pleasant cynicism which makes the play a real addition to satirical literature. It was acted excellently by Mr. Calvert as St. Simeon, and the subsidiary parts were all well done—with the exception of the devil, whose representative struck me as being a good actor unsuitably cast. Finally, I visited the Lancaster Footlights Club, who put on "The Twelve-Pound Look." This is, of course, a brilliant play, but it has been

"done to death" both by professionals and by amateurs. I felt that, failing some piece of acting that should put everything else I had seen quite in the shade, I could hardly send this old favourite to America. The production was sound in every way, but not so outstanding as to keep Lancaster in the running.

### THE FINAL DECISION

As I travelled back to London, reviewing my seven visits and the nine productions I had seen, I found that my mind had made itself up (independently, as it were, of myself) on some points. The issue lay between Welwyn and Huddersfield ("St. Simeon") with Mrs. Spencer-Watson's "The Winged Horse" and Mr. Gregson's "Liddy" not far behind. By way of getting another angle of vision on the question, I then tried the experiment of allotting marks to all the competitors, according to the standard laid down for the judges in America (50 per cent. for presentation, 25 per cent. for acting, 15 per cent. for setting, 10 per cent. for choice of play); only to find, when I added the marks up, that Welwyn and "St. Simeon" were still bracketed first, with "The Winged Horse" three marks behind them, and "Liddy" two behind that. I dismissed the two latter, together with the marking system, from further consideration, and concentrated upon what may be called the finalists. These two plays are as different as they well can be, representing two sharply-defined schools of thought. If I were called upon to choose which of the two I should prefer to put money into, or to submit to a popular vote, I should not hesitate for a moment; "The Banns of Marriage" would have it. But on the other hand, this play is only a good example of the kind of thing the professional theatre gives us regularly; "St. Simeon" is an instance of that breaking away from stale conventions which the Drama League and the American Little Theatres both exist to encourage. For that reason I prefer to see the English amateur stage represented by "St. Simeon," and it is with an easy conscience that I award to that production the guerdon; or, as some prefer to put it, the biscuit.

# THE AMATEUR ACTOR AND THE PLAY

By Vernon A. Porter

WORD has gone forth that there will be a great renaissance in the theatre during the next ten years. It has been spoken by professors in the universities; it has been hinted by critics in the market place. That it is a true word, no one who is conversant with the drama is likely to deny. There are not merely a few straws to show the direction of the wind, but many very obvious indications of the trend of affairs. Not the least significant of these is the continual increase in the number of amateur play-producing societies.

So much has been written and is still being written about the activities of such societies, that all those who take an interest in contemporary social life must be well acquainted with the subject. There is however, one factor of this amateur theatrical movement that has not received the consideration it deserves—its effect upon the audiences of professional theatres and consequently upon the standard of acting and choice of plays in these theatres.

It is generally admitted that the law of supply and demand holds good in the theatre as much as it does in the commercial world, and therefore that an audience gets the plays and acting it deserves. The war years proved that conclusively; and this statement is made despite Mr. St. John Ervine's contention that better plays were demanded but were not forthcoming. If there was such a demand, it was made by a minority and not by the masses. Since those days the standard demanded by London audiences has improved considerably, and one of the most potent forces that has brought about this improvement is the amateur theatrical society, which has been educating the playgoer.

The average man and woman go to the theatre in search of sensation, simply and solely to be lifted out of themselves in order to be able to experience vicariously sensations which, in many cases, subservience to convention has prevented their feeling in

actual life. What critical faculty they possess is the result of a kind of parthenogenesis, being born of the senses alone, without the co-operation of the masculine element of reason. Since the average playgoer is the predominant element in the audience at most theatres—the Old Vic. is one obvious exception—it is a natural corollary that the drama provided by most managers is of a sensational type. The sex theme probably makes the greatest appeal, as a certain Sunday play-producing society has discovered, at the same time proving that those who lay claim to superior intelligence are not always able to make the intellect master of the senses. The war, also, has been used for sensational effect, and when the theme of the play is lacking in this desideratum, it is supplied by a bizarre or grotesque setting. This kind of performance does not, cannot evoke the best acting. It does not afford sufficient scope for the intelligence of the actor.

That intelligence is one of the most necessary things in the equipment of the actor is a fact which has doubtless been regarded as a platitude in the theatrical profession for many years, but it is only just beginning to be realized by the audience. The spreading of this knowledge is due to the amateur actors who are learning it by experience. So much used to be said about great emotional actresses that it came to be thought that emotional capacity was the foundation of all histrionic success. Presumably it was supposed that the producer supplied the brains—as doubtless he does in many cases. But it is the actor or actress whose other accomplishments are supplemented by a keen, well-instructed intelligence who alone can satisfy the connoisseur—rather than the expert critic, for the two are not necessarily one and the same person—of acting. The emotions are a greater hindrance than help if they are not the servants of the intellect.

It is in this capacity of connoisseur that the amateur player attends the theatre. He

## THE AMATEUR ACTOR AND THE PLAY

has at least a general knowledge, if not a deep and comprehensive understanding, of the whole technique of acting. He knows something of the component parts of a good individual performance. He realizes that voice-production, elocution, gesture, make-up, co-operation with other members of the cast, to mention a few things, must receive full attention if the performance is to be a success. And learning these things from his own experience, he looks for them when he goes to the theatre. Sometimes he admires the artistry with which an effect is produced—a point which entirely escapes the notice of the average playgoer—at another time (as in "The Truth about Blayds") he blames the producer for using such clumsy methods that his object is defeated, and the impression is given of a building before the scaffolding has been removed. At a small theatre, such as the Everyman Theatre, Hampstead, he can appreciate the skill in make-up which, despite the proximity of the audience, creates the illusion of reality. He even learns to bring an intelligent criticism to bear upon the delivery of blank verse. All this and much more underlies the attitude of the amateur player towards a professional performance, and it greatly adds to his enjoyment and appreciation of a good play well acted.

It is in this appreciation, this just weighing in the critical balance, that his service to the theatre lies; for as his critical faculties develop (as they must necessarily do as his experience becomes wider) and he becomes the better able to discriminate between good and bad, so will he become discontented with inefficient acting and demand work of a higher standard. And even though the percentage of amateur actors in an audience is small, it is large enough and moreover sufficiently enthusiastic to make an appreciable effect upon the rest, just as a small amount of yeast will turn a lump of dough into a loaf of bread.

All that has been said with regard to acting applies equally to plays. As the amateur actor is able from his better understanding of the art to appreciate good acting and is therefore certain to demand a high standard, so does the same experience make him a more discriminating critic of plays and instinctively to prefer the highest

when he perceives it. He learns the boredom, the feeling of wasted time, in having to take part in a fatuous play, of having a part in which there is no scope for his faculties, but particularly in being asked to represent characters or actions which his imagination and intelligence condemn as untrue to life. From being frequently engaged in acting or rehearsing, perhaps also in selecting plays for presentation, he becomes nauseated with the sameness and, generally speaking, unpleasantness of the plots of the plays that are offered to him. Just as he gains an insight into the technique of acting, so he acquires a certain knowledge of the technical difficulties of the dramatist. He is forced, also, in the bitterness of his heart, to recognize that the second-rate play is most successful with the average audience. In this connexion, it is a striking fact, which it would be interesting to analyse, that the playgoer of to-day strongly objects to tragedy.

Another advantage that the amateur in the audience has, and one that is perhaps the most important to the welfare of the theatre, is the ability to form his opinions independently of the professional critic.

In these ways is the amateur actor playing his part—and it is not a small one—in the renaissance of the drama, of which he himself is a portent. He is also an assurance of its accomplishment.

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### THE SUNDAY THEATRE.

A correspondent writes to us remarking on the coincidence of the attempt to bring about the Sunday opening of theatres with the threatened action in Parliament to curtail the activities of Sunday Play Producing Societies. "Both movements," writes our correspondent, "are equally sinister, and if they were successful our London stage would suffer grievous harm. It has been suggested that theatres open commercially on Sunday would close on Monday. This is managerial bluff in its worst form, and the actors would be the first to suffer, as they realized well enough when they turned down a similar proposal by an overwhelming majority at the Haymarket meeting four years ago. Sunday Producing Societies, on the other hand, have done splendid work both for new authors and for new actors. As for the moral question, I, personally, am in favour of a stage censorship. But I recognize that just as hospitals are permitted to contain exhibition rooms which could not suitably be open to the general public, so the technicians and experts of the theatre should sometimes be permitted to view and act in plays which may not be altogether desirable for a popular audience."

# NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

## THE UNNAMED SOCIETY, MANCHESTER

"THE PLEASURE GARDEN," BY BEATRICE MAYOR

What a world it is that Mrs. Mayor shows us in this play! What a gigantic gathering of separate lives, merging and shoving, each life intent on itself and aware of existence around only when some other hatted beast gets in its way; each life discontented but enduring, all greedy, with hot lusts and ambitions and colour-thoughts, with sadnesses and miseries and prides, and not one altogether vile! Mrs. Mayor simply takes afternoon and evening in a public park and puts them on the stage for us, threaded by the quaint little figure of a student wandering about and trying to understand. And this *Pleasure Garden*—where folk jabber out their hearts, rage, scold, grin, and shriek at one another their loves—this *Pleasure Garden*, indeed, forms a significant setting for a play charged with new lights. Through it runs an allegory of crabs which the student has been watching in their green, glassy sea-pool, and we are shown in human beings just the same frenzies which animate the cold, grim denizens of the deep. It is a picture profoundly moving, somewhat neurasthenic, as all vivid criticisms are bound to be, but infinitely suggestive and real.

Mr. F. Sladen-Smith, who produced the play with consummate skill, very rightly emphasized its fierce humour and its eerie moments of tranquillity. Everything, in his wise hands, was right. Even the gramophone park-band was timed to come in with soft or loud or quick movements in accordance with the emotions expressed on the stage. The setting was designed by Miss Margaret Nicholls—a really effective background for some clever lighting and grouping—and the cast throughout was splendid; but the supreme honours fell to the authoress. In its economic use of material, its wit, subtlety, and grasp of character, "*The Pleasure Garden*" will very soon be ranked as a masterpiece.

W. D. S.

## IMPERIAL COLLEGE MUSICAL AND DRAMATIC SOCIETY

The Imperial College Musical and Dramatic Society gave a performance of "*Outward Bound*" on March 25 in the hall of the College Union, Prince Consort Road, London. One was impressed again with the admirable qualities of this play from the standpoint of amateur production. The scene used was excellent in its simplicity, and the sharply differentiated characters gave scope for some excellent studies. What particularly pleased the Drama League critic was the fact that the actors made no attempt at slavish imitation of the professional actors who played in the original production. For instance, the "*Examiner*" was conceived in quite a different vein from Mr. Roy Byford's performance, and on its own lines was quite convincing. On the whole, our criticism would be that the performance lacked emphasis. On the other hand, intelligence was displayed throughout, and the humour of the play was preserved to such purpose that the audience laughed heartily at every witticism. Altogether a very creditable production.

## ZODIAC CLUB

On Friday, March 26, the Zodiac Club gave a performance of "*Outward Bound*," by Sutton Vane, at Streatham Hall. It has been considered on all sides that this production was one of the most successful ever given by the club, both from the actors' and producer's point of view. The atmosphere of vagueness and mystery was extremely well maintained, and each individual character was well differentiated and carried out. Great credit is due to Miss Doris Dunn, who not only played the part of Mrs. Cliveden Banks in an original and convincing manner, but also was responsible for the production of the play.

The high standard of art attained by the Zodiac Club makes one look forward to seeing a performance by them of a play which had not already been a West End success. This, we think, would give more scope to their powers of original characterization.

## NEW FACILITIES FOR THE AMATEUR

Up to now, one of the greatest difficulties in the way of the more progressive type of amateur company has been to obtain suitable scenery and properties. Usually they are offered, at the scene-painting studios, the antiquated remnants of a provincial tour, or the suggestion that a hideous stock set intended for a hackneyed comic opera "could be made to do." No wonder that the amateur so often falls back on curtains and a bareness of stage which, in self-defence, he calls simplicity. It is an important and gratifying sign of the times that the Argosy Arts and Theatre Service has been established to give thoroughly up-to-date advice and service to the amateur in all matters of scenery, lighting, properties, costumes, posters, masks—everything, indeed, that the amateur can possibly require. A permanent exhibition of scene models, which will be completely changed every month, is being held in the model-room at the Argosy offices at 26 Coventry Street, Piccadilly. This month's exhibition can be thoroughly recommended to everybody interested in modern methods of staging and lighting.

## ST. GEORGE'S PLAYERS

On Saturday, March 27, at St. George's Hall, Kensington Palace, this Society gave its second production in the form of a triple bill, consisting of "*Lost Property*," by Ann Stevenson and Allan Macbeth; "*The Monkey's Paw*," by W. W. Jacobs; and "*Five Birds in a Cage*," by Gertrude Jennings.

The Players consist of a number of keen young people who obviously thoroughly enjoyed the performance, and who showed such determination and enthusiasm as should go far towards enabling them to attain a very high standard, especially as they also have the advantage and the coaching of Miss M. Douglass.

A triple bill is not an easy thing for an inexperienced society to attempt, and the success with which each item was given encourages us to expect great things from these players.

It will be of interest to note that the producer, Miss Douglass, has been giving a considerable portion of her time during the past few months in most helpful work for the Drama League Library.



## NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

### LONDON LABOUR DRAMATIC FEDERATION

The Sunday evening performance of "The Insect Play" at the Strand Theatre was more notable for the excellence of individuals than for the production as a whole. It is a play which requires to be handled with more sureness and precision than can be reached in a limited number of rehearsals. But although a certain woolliness in the production was probably unavoidable, there is no reason why it should have been produced with so meagre an amount of imagination. The second act, among the Creepers and Crawlers, was extremely effective, as it depends more on individuals and less on ensemble than the others. Every part in this scene was admirably played, especially Mr. and Mrs. Beetle and Mr. and Mrs. Cricket. In the first act, among the Butterflies, only Iris and Otto were up to the standard of the Creepers and Crawlers. The third act, among the Ants, was the least successful. One missed the feeling of a merciless, relentless pulsation. The epilogue was done to death at once by the antiquated hideousness of the setting. The original costumes were used, and Mr. Edmund Willard was in his old part of the tramp.

### "SIR THOMAS MORE" AT CROSBY HALL

At Crosby Hall Miss Gwen Lally produced on Saturday, March 27, a play by the Hon. Mrs. Bray, entitled "Sir Thomas More," which gave in three acts and several episodes the story of More's downfall, with some intimate pictures of his family life. The play was remarkable for the sense it gave one of historical atmosphere, and much of the dialogue was convincing from this point of view. In the early scenes, however, the action was somewhat slow, and one felt that the play would have dragged had it not been for the great skill with which Miss Lally tackled the presentation. The best performance was that of Sir Thomas himself. This actor really gave the impression of a learned humanist of the period. The king was scarcely so convincing, but the "family" acted gracefully and well. As might be expected in a production of Miss Lally's, the scenery and costumes were extremely effective.

### "SALMA"

The Birmingham University Dramatic Society presented on Tuesday, March 2, for the first time on any stage, "Salma," an Oriental play, by L. Cranmer-Byng. This, the first production of the society in its present form, was a most ambitious undertaking, involving no fewer than forty players. All the work in connexion with the performance has been done by members of the society, the only professional assistance called in being that of the producer, Mr. E. Stuart Vinden, of the Repertory Theatre, and the scenic designer, Mr. Alec Shanks. The scenery and costumes to the number of sixty have all been made by members of the society under his direction. Much credit is also due to the electrician, who obtained many beautiful lighting effects, and to the stage manager, who arranged extensive changes of scenes with celerity and silence.

The acting was consistently good. The most notable performance was that of Miss Madeleine

Carroll in the title-rôle. She played a difficult part with charm and force of character, and was well supported by Mr. A. L. d'Ahren as the Persian lute-player, Shamsuddin. At the close of the performance Captain Cranmer-Byng, in a graceful speech of thanks, said: "This play was my appeal to youth, and this young and enthusiastic company have responded magnificently."

### THE PORTISHEAD PLAYERS

*The Secretary,*  
British Drama League,  
London.

Dear Sir,—I have been requested by the Committee of the above society to lay before you a few facts in regard to public performances which were given recently by members, and which are relative to certain remarks passed in the recent conference held at Birmingham concerning the payment of royalties by small amateur societies like ourselves.

The plays produced were "Double Demon," by Herbert, and "The Mollusc," by Davies, on December 4 and 5 last year. The total capacity of the hall at our disposal is 140, and the number of tickets sold for the two performances was 217, so that about 75 per cent. of the seats were filled, and our takings, after deducting entertainment tax, was £17 11s. 9d. This meant that after paying authors' fees, which amounted to £14 14s., we had under £3 to pay for the hire of the hall for the two performances, dress rehearsal, and ordinary rehearsals. After paying most of the expenses we found that there was a loss of £9 6s. 11d., which to a small society like ours is a serious matter, as our membership is only about 150.

We decided to bring our case to the notice of the Drama League in order that you could bring this up as a concrete case of undoubted hardship, and also that you could give us your valued advice as to the possibility of our getting a small amount of the fees already paid to the holders of the playing rights of these two plays refunded. This state of affairs means that we are practically bound to produce plays on which there are no royalties to pay or, alternatively, only those which can be given on payment of reduced fees. On the last play previous to the ones in question, which was "The School for Scandal," we were able to make a profit of £3, simply because we did not have to pay any high author's fees.

Trusting you will be able to make use of this information and that you will be able to give us your advice, and thanking you in anticipation,

I am, yours faithfully,  
A. C. SLY,  
Hon. Sec., Portishead Players.

[We are glad to print this letter, as it affords a piece of conclusive evidence as to the hardships endured by many of the smaller amateur groups in connexion with Authors' Fees. We feel sure that as the facts become known authors will be convinced of the value, if only in their own interests, of the Royalty basis.—*Editor, DRAMA.*]



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